

Behind the Guns

Exposing the Myanmar Military's Weapon Makers



Introduction

On April 26th, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing attended the 75th Anniversary of Defence Industries Corps, held in Naypyidaw. During the Diamond Jubilee celebration, he [remarked](#) that military weapons and equipment would have their effectiveness tested on the battlefield, so, efforts must be made across all sectors to produce them with higher quality, greater power, and improved performance.

Operating under the motto “Power to the Forces,” the junta’s Defence Industries—responsible for producing a wide range of weapons and equipment—have played a critical behind-the-scenes role in enabling the military’s past and ongoing atrocities against the people of Myanmar, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, such as the 2017 Rohingya genocide and the brutal campaign of terror following the 2021 attempted coup.



Min Aung Hlaing attending the ceremony the 75th Anniversary of the Defence Industries Day

Source: SAC website

Since the attempted coup, the terrorist military has [increasingly relied on](#) domestic weapons manufacturing to support its campaign of terror against the people of Myanmar. In order to sustain its unprecedented escalation of airstrikes targeting civilian populations, the junta's defence industries have [ramped up production](#) of various types of aerial bombs. Reports indicate that some of the ammunition seized by resistance forces from junta stockpiles during battles was marked with [2025 production dates](#)—including some manufactured just weeks before being deployed on the battlefield. This underscore how the daily weapons production by the Defence Industries is deadly essential to sustaining the junta’s ongoing war efforts.



Ammunition seized by resistance forces in Yesagyo Township in first week of March, 2025, marked with a production date of February 2025

Source: Locals



Shell of a cluster bomb dropped by the junta's air force found in Kyondoe Township, marked with a production date of 20 April 2025.

Source: Myanmar Defence & Security Institute

While a few perpetrators and commanders involved in atrocity crimes during the junta's brutal military campaign against the people of Myanmar are facing some limited international sanctions, those who play a critical role in manufacturing weapons used in these international crimes remain largely unknown. It is crucial to recognize that responsibility for war crimes and acts of brutality does not rest solely with those who pull the trigger, but also on those who produce the weapons. In this report, the Tamar Institute exposes the top-level junta officials responsible for overseeing the domestic weapons production that fuel and sustain the junta's campaign of terror. The investigation is based on research and verification using publicly available sources—including official statements and announcements issued by the military junta—as well as information from human sources with direct knowledge of the military's weapons production sector.

The Junta's Domestic Weapons Industry

Myanmar's domestic weapons production is overseen by the Office of the Chief of the Directorate of Defence Industries (DDI), which operates under the command of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army). [The United States](#), [the United Kingdom](#), and [Canada](#), imposed sanctions on the DDI in December, 2021 for its critical role in manufacturing weapons used to carry out the military's ongoing and past atrocities against civilians including Rohingya genocide. In [its sanctions](#)

[announcement](#), the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) stated that “the weapons produced by the DDI have been certainly used in the military’s brutal violence against civilians.” The current Chief of the Directorate is Lieutenant-General Kan Myint Than, [who has been sanctioned](#) by the Canadian government. He is supported by two deputy-chiefs holding the rank of Major General. Weapons, ammunition, and other junta military equipment are produced at Defence Industry factories, commonly known as KaPaSa (short for *Karkweye Pyitsee Setyone*), which operate under the Office of the Chief of the DDI.

According to publicly available sources, there are 25 KaPaSa factories, most of which are in central Myanmar—particularly in Magway and Bago regions. These factories [manufacture](#) a wide range of military weapons, from small arms and ammunition to powerful aerial bombs and missiles.

The Commanders Behind the Weapons Factories

KaPaSa factories are overseen by senior military engineers holding the rank of Colonel, who serve as factory heads. Many of them are graduates of the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT), now known as Yangon Technological University (YTU), and have also completed training at the Officer Training School (OTS). In recent years, graduates from the Defence Services Technological Academy (DSTA) have also begun taking on leadership roles as factory heads. While these officers are not the ones directly pulling the trigger, they are the producers of the weapons used in the junta’s atrocities particularly in 2017 Rohingya Genocide and [mass killings](#) following the 2021 attempted coup. Their role in enabling this violence makes them, without question, perpetrators with blood on their hands. The names of three senior commanders from the Office of the Chief of the DDI, along with the heads of 25 KaPaSa factories—all of whom bear significant responsibility for arming and enabling the junta’s international crimes—are identified as follows.

Top Senior Officers of DDI

1. Lieutenant-General Kan Myint Than (Army 18276)

Chief of the Directorate of Defence Industries

2. Major General Ko Ko Lwin *

Deputy-Chief of the Directorate of Defence Industries

3. Major General Myo Aung

Deputy-Chief of the Directorate of Defence Industries



Lieutenant-General Kan Myint Than, sanctioned Chief of the Directorate of Defence Industries (DDI). Source: SAC Website

* Major General Ko Ko Lwin was appointed as the junta's Minister of Energy in 2023, and a new deputy-chief of the DDI has yet to be identified.

Heads of 25 Defence Industries Factories

No	Name	Position	Name of Factory (KaPaSa)
1.	Colonel Zaw Myo Min	Head	No.1 Defence Industry Factory
2.	Colonel Hla Thein	Head	No.2 Defence Industry Factory
3.	Colonel Maung Soe	Head	No.3 Defence Industry Factory
4.	Lieutenant-Colonel Zaw Min Tun	Head	No.4 Defence Industry Factory
5.	Brigadier General Htwe Hla	Head	No. 5 Defence Industry Factory
6.	Colonel Toe Lwin	Head	No.6 Defence Industry Factory
7.	Colonel Tun Tun Soe	Head	No.7 Defence Industry Factory

8.	Colonel Min Soe	Head	No.8 Defence Industry Factory
9.	Colonel Tin Maung Cho	Head	No.9 Defence Industry Factory
10.	Colonel Shwe Mya	Head	No.10 Defence Industry Factory
11.	Colonel Min Min Zaw	Head	No.11 Defence Industry Factory
12.	Colonel Naing Aung	Head	No.12 Defence Industry Factory
13.	Colonel Tun Tun Aye	Head	No.13 Defence Industry Factory
14.	Colonel Ye Zaw Htwe	Head	No.14 Defence Industry Factory
15.	Colonel Win Myint Maung	Head	No.15 Defence Industry Factory
16.	Colonel Zaw Tun Oo	Head	No.16 Defence Industry Factory
17.	Colonel Thein Lwin	Head	No.17 Defence Industry Factory
18.	Colonel Zaw Myo Naing	Head	No.18 Defence Industry Factory
19.	Lieutenant-Colonel Aung Htwe	Head	No.19 Defence Industry Factory
20.	Colonel Thet Win Aung	Head	No.20 Defence Industry Factory
21.	Colonel Nyi Nyi Latt	Head	No.21 Defence Industry Factory
22.	Lieutenant-Colonel Myat Thu	Head	No.22 Defence Industry Factory
23.	Colonel Toe Lwin**	Head	No.23 Defence Industry Factory
24.	Colonel Aung Ko Ko	Head	No.24 Defence Industry Factory
25.	Colonel Yan Aye	Head	No.25 Defence Industry Factory

** Colonel Toe Lwin, former head of No. 23 KaPaSa, has been transferred to lead No. 6 KaPaSa. The new head of No. 23 KaPaSa has yet to be identified.

Other Crimes Committed by KaPaSa Factory Commanders

The KaPaSa are considered the backbone of the Myanmar military's armament efforts. They have long operated under the slogan: "Even if there is a world war, we ought to do only production." However, this approach shifted following the attempted coup in 2021. As the junta faced growing resistance across the country, it began deploying KaPaSa personnel—originally assigned to production roles—into frontline operations, clearance missions, and security duties. It was reported that [KaPaSa soldiers](#) also involved in frontline clashes. According to documentation by the Tamar Institute, personnel from KaPaSa have been involved in serious crimes against civilians, including arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, village raids and burnings, as well as heavy weapon attacks on civilian areas. As such, KaPaSa commanders are not only key enablers who supply the

military junta with weapons and ammunition—they are also direct perpetrators of atrocities committed against civilians.

Moreover, according to research by the Tamar Institute, some heads of KaPaSa also serve as military region commanders (referred to as "military regions," which are distinct from civilian administrative regions) and are primarily responsible for all security-related matters within their respective areas. For instance, Colonel Naing Aung, head of KaPaSa No.12, also serves as the military region commander of Thayet; Colonel Shwe Mya, head of KaPaSa No.10, oversees the Malun military region; and Colonel Thet Win Aung, head of KaPaSa No.20, commands the Salin military region. As military region commanders, they hold authority over all security operations within their regions. Therefore, they bear responsibility for a range of serious crimes against civilians in their respective military regions following the attempted coup—including arbitrary arrests, torture, extortion, unlawful detention, killings, travel restrictions, and the forced conscription of civilians.

Tamar Institute's observations reveal that [KaPaSa officers play key pillars](#) in junta's ongoing campaign of terror. Within the junta's repressive administrative structures—particularly the district and township administration councils—senior military officers are often appointed to the position of Member (1). Among the seven district administrative councils in the Magway Region, KaPaSa personnel holding the rank of Lieutenant Colonel serve as Member (1) of Gangaw, Thayet, and Aunglan district administrative councils. Additionally, KaPaSa officers holding the rank of Major serve as Member (1) in at least 10 out of 25 township administrative councils across the region—including Myothit, Chauk, Salin, Ngape, Sadoktayar, Thayet, Kanma, Min Hla, Sinbaungwe, and Pauk. These district and township administrative councils form the foundational units of the military's oppressive governance system and are directly involved in a wide range of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, torture, intimidation, extortion, and the forced conscription of civilians.

Titles and Honours Stained with the Blood of the People

Senior military engineers leading and overseeing the production of weapons used in violent operations against the people of Myanmar have been [awarded military](#)

[honours and titles](#) by coup leader Min Aung Hlaing, reflecting the regime’s respect and gratitude for their contributions. In his speech at the 75th Anniversary of the Defence Industries Corps, the junta chief stated that a total of 513 personnel from the Defence Industries have been awarded national and military honours, titles, and badges to date. According to an analysis by the Tamar Institute, based on junta-issued statements, nearly all KaPaSa factory heads were awarded medals and titles by the junta chief between the attempted coup and 2025. Lieutenant General Kan Myint Than, Chief of the DDI, and General Ko Ko Lwin, then-Deputy Chief of the DDI, were awarded the prestigious ["Thray Sithu" honorary title](#)—officially granted to those recognized for so-called exceptional service. Similarly, General Myo Aung, also a Deputy Chief of the DDI, received the ["Zayya Kyawhtin" medal](#), an honour designated for distinguished military service. In addition, nearly all DDI factory heads were awarded a range of military badges and medals, including the Myanmar Military Service Thingaha Badge, the Outstanding Military Service Badge, and medals recognizing “Excellent Performance” in fields such as administration, industry, technology, science, and the commerce economy. These honours and titles were awarded in recognition of their critical roles in producing weapons—bullets, bombs, and explosives—used in the junta’s atrocity crimes, their involvement in international crimes, and their positions as key pillars of the junta’s campaign of terror, making these awards irreversibly stained with the blood of innocent civilians, including children.

Awards and honours awarded to leaders of Defence Industries following the 2021 attempted coup, up to May 2025

No	Name	Awarded Titles, Medals and Badges	Year Awarded
1.	Lieutenant General Kan Myint Than	Sithu and Thray Sithu	2022 and 2023
2.	Major General Ko Ko Lwin	Myanmar Military Service ThinGaha Badge and Thray Sithu	2022 and 2023
3	Major General Myo Aung	Zayya Kyahtin	2022
4	Colonel Hla Thein	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2022
5	Colonel Maung Soe	Excellent Performance in Technology (Second Class)	2023

6	Lieutenant-Colonel Zaw Min Tun	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2024
7	Brigadier General Htwe Hla	Myanmar Military Service ThinGaha Badge	2024
8	Colonel Toe Lwin	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2023
9	Colonel Tun Tun Soe	Excellent Performance in Administration Field (Third Class)	2023
10.	Colonel Min Soe	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2023
11.	Colonel Tin Maung Cho	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2025
12.	Colonel Shwe Mya	Excellent Performance in Technology (Second Class)	2022
13.	Colonel Min Min Zaw	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2023
14.	Colonel Naing Aung	Excellent Performance in Technology (Third Class) and Excellent Performance in Technology (Second Class)	2022 and 2024
15.	Colonel Tun Tun Aye	Myanmar Military Service ThinGaha Badge	2025
16.	Colonel Ye Zaw Htwe	Excellent Performance in Science	2021
17.	Colonel Zaw Tun Oo	Excellent Performance in Industrial Economy (Third Class)	2022
18.	Colonel Thein Lwin	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2023
19.	Colonel Zaw Myo Naing	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2023
20.	Lieutenant-Colonel Aung Htwe	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2024

21.	Colonel Thet Win Aung	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2022
22.	Colonel Nyi Nyi Latt	Excellent Performance in Technology (Third Class)	2025
23.	Lieutenant-Colonel Kyie Myat Thu	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2024
24.	Colonel Aung Ko Ko	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2025
25.	Colonel Yan Aye	Outstanding Military Service Badge	2023

Call for International Action

International governments and communities should impose sanctions and restrictions on individuals primarily responsible for domestic arms production, which supplies the military with weapons to continue its violent operations against civilians.

Tamar Institute calls on the European Union and the Australian government to follow the example of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada by imposing sanctions on the Office of the Chief of Directorate of Defence Industries. Furthermore, Tamar Institute calls international governments to impose targeted sanctions on top leaders of the DDI as well as the heads of KaPaSa factories. Tamar Institute also urges the National Unity Government (NUG) to publicly blacklist the top leaders of the DDI and the KaPaSa factory heads identified in this report.

The junta's domestic weapons manufacturing factories are crucial pillars of the military's international crimes. While weapons manufacturers may not be the ones pulling the trigger or dropping the bombs, they are directly responsible for producing the bullets and explosives that have killed thousands of innocent civilians. Without question, they are complicit, with blood on their hands, for enabling the junta's atrocities. The military engineers identified in this report must

be held accountable not only for their complicity in the international crimes committed by the military, but also for their direct involvement in ordering, overseeing, and participating in the commission of those international crimes.